



Anxiety Disorders  
20 (2006) 1103–1117

JOURNAL  
OF  
**Anxiety  
Disorders**

## The relationship between cognitive avoidance and attentional bias for snake-related thoughts

Tamer I. Fawzy<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jeffrey E. Hecker<sup>b</sup>, James Clark<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Department of Psychology, Department 3415, University of Wyoming,  
1000 E. University Avenue, Laramie, WY 82071, USA*

<sup>b</sup> *University of Maine, USA*

Received 24 July 2005; received in revised form 13 December 2005; accepted 27 January 2006

---

### Abstract

Building on the work of Lavy and van den Hout (Lavy, E. H., & van den Hout, M. A. (1994a). Cognitive avoidance and attentional bias: Causal relationships. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 18 (2) 179–191; Lavy, E. H., & van den Hout, M. A. (1994b). Cognitive avoidance and attentional bias: Causal relationships. *Behavior Therapy*, 24, 645–657), the purpose of the present study was to examine a functional relationship between thought suppression and attentional bias for snake-related thoughts. It was hypothesized that thought suppression is causally involved in the emergence of attentional bias. An experiment was conducted with 71 snake-fearful and non-snake-fearful participants to investigate whether instructions for suppression were sufficient to induce an attentional bias toward snake-related words.

Thirty-five participants were instructed to suppress all snake-related thoughts, while 36 participants received control instructions. Both groups then completed a 5-min stream of consciousness exercise followed by a dot-probe attention task including snake words, general emotion words, and neutral words. Results indicated that participants instructed to suppress snake-related thoughts exhibited a more pronounced attentional bias toward snake-related word pairs. The same participants did not exhibit an attentional bias toward general emotion or neutral words. Moreover, there was a significant negative correlation between snake-related thoughts and probe detection latency. Results are interpreted as

---

\* Tel.: +1 307 766 6303.

E-mail address: tfawzy@uwo.edu (T.I. Fawzy).

providing support for a causal relationship between thought suppression and attentional bias for snake-related thoughts.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Attentional bias; Thought suppression; Snake-phobia

---

The role of cognition in the onset and maintenance of anxiety disorders has traditionally been studied from one of two perspectives: (a) thought content (i.e., cognitive products), and (b) information processing (i.e., cognitive processes) (Lavy & van den Hout, 1994a, 1994b). Clinical research focusing on thought content, has found that individuals suffering from anxiety report certain disorder specific maladaptive beliefs (Lavy & van den Hout, 1994a, 1994b). Contemporary theories of cognitive processes have identified thought suppression and attentional bias as two mechanisms that are important in the acquisition and regulation of threatening or aversive thought content.

Studies examining the relationship between emotional disturbance and attention have generally used variations on three paradigms: Stroop tasks, visual attention tasks, and dichotic listening tasks (Wenzel & Holt, 1999). To date, most studies examining attentional bias in anxious individuals have relied on the Stroop color-naming task. Researchers using the Stroop task have reliably shown an interference effect in participants diagnosed with GAD (Mathews & MacLeod, 1985; Mogg, Mathews, & Weinman, 1989), PTSD (Foa, Feske, Murdock, Kozak, & McCarthy, 1991; McNally et al., 1990), and OCD (Foa, Llai, McCarthy, Shoyer, & Murdock, 1993; Lavy et al., 1994). Moreover, the observed interference is specific to threat words relevant to participants' presenting disorder, and appears to diminish after successful behavior therapy (see Williams, Mathews, & MacLeod, 1996 for a review). Likewise, participants diagnosed with specific phobia have demonstrated an interference effect in studies utilizing the Stroop task. Watts, McKenna, Sharrock, and Trezise (1986) were among the first researchers to demonstrate an emotional Stroop effect with spider-avoidant participants. Results showed that only the spider avoidant participants showed the predicted interference effect. Moreover, the interference was exclusive to spider words.

Mathews and Sebastian (1993) conducted three experiments with 112 participants having either high or low snake fearfulness. In all three experiments, participants were asked to complete a modified Stroop task. In the first two experiments, in a group of spider avoidant individuals, all participants completed a modified Stroop task. In the first experiment, all participants were first instructed to approach a covered glass tank containing an 18-inch boa constrictor. Contrary to the author's predictions, results showed that participants reporting a high fear of snakes did not take longer to color-name words related to snakes than they did to color name neutral words. In the second experiment, using the exact same methodology, absent the live boa constrictor, the authors found the predicted interference effect. In the third experiment, one group was again asked to

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات